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ABSTRACT

Rural school districts face special problems in serving children with multiple/severe low incidence handicaps. One option not usually considered for this population is full time regular class placement. Five models may be used in regular class placement: (1) team teaching in which two appropriately certified teachers share management responsibilities; (2) parallel teaching in which two teachers share the space but maintain separate roles and responsibilities; (3) regular classroom based tutorial in which the regular classroom teacher merely shares space with the tutor and student; (4) separate tutorial with regular classroom support, in which the tutor and student share the regular classroom for certain periods; and (5) regular classroom placement with support services, in which a trained teacher assistant works with the student in the regular classroom. Some models may be more appropriate for certain age groups, and all require a degree of staff cooperation and sharing of school resources. (CL)

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REGULAR CLASSROOM PLACEMENT OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE AND MULTIPLE SPECIAL NEEDS: A POTENTIAL SOLUTION TO A RURAL PROBLEM

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REGULAR CLASSROOM PLACEMENT OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE AND MULTIPLE SPECIAL NEEDS: A POTENTIAL SOLUTION TO A RURAL PROBLEM

Serving students with low incidence handicapping conditions is a difficult task for rural and remote areas. It is particularly difficult if the students have severe and/or multiple special needs. As larger public schools across the country have geared up to accept the challenge of providing services to these students, they have often developed solutions that are impossible, or impractical, for rural areas to adopt. Most of these solutions are based upon grouping these students in self-contained classrooms in either regional segregated public schools, or in self-contained classrooms in integrated public schools. Reports of such programs have been published regarding varying adaptations to these models (side-by-side). Most recently studies are being conducted regarding the interaction between these students and their normal peers.

Many rural areas are unable to use these models for two primary reasons: (1) the number of children in a particular school district may be only one or two, and (2) the great distance between school districts may prohibit regionalizing with other rural districts. When these circumstances exist, rural LEAs have been forced to choose more restrictive means of serving their students. These include: (1) out of district residential placement; (2) home-bound instruction; or (3) in-school, isolated, one-to-one tutoring. Each of these options has its own limitations. One option which is not usually considered is that of regular classroom placement for these students.

At first, full-time regular class placement of students with severe and/or multiple special needs may seem unrealistic. However, what is offered here is the consideration of the full scale of options available to the students. Some

ways that such placements might be made include:

(1) Team-teaching--This model includes the teaming of two teachers in the same classroom. One appropriately certified "regular" education teacher, and one apporpriately certified teacher of students with severe and multiple handicaps. Teachers manage the classroom together, sharing skills and ideas. Each maintains primary responsibility for those students for which he/she was trained to serve, while sharing day to classroom management, responsibilities and skills. It is estimated that two or three students with severe and/or multiple handicaps could be served in a classroom in this manner. Related support services are carried out in the classroom in a way most complementary to the particular classroom. The students receive one-to-one and small group work as appropriate and also interact in all classroom activities to whatever extent possible. The regular classroom teacher becomes part of the IEP Team along with the special education personnel.

(2) Parallel Teaching--The parallel teaching models involves the sharing of classroom space by two teachers who maintain separate roles and responsibilities. One teacher is certified as a regular educator while the other holds most appropriate special education certification. In this model it is likely that therapies and other special services take place outside the classroom, and that interaction between handicapped and non-handicapped students occurs during "free" periods and "peer-tutor" sessions which are specifically scheduled. In this model, the special educator assumes the full responsibility for the student's IEP. The regular educator assumes full responsibility for

the non-handicapped students. Joint responsibilities exist for classroom organization and the sharing of resources. Other classroom responsibilities are assumed by the regular educator.

(3) Regular Classroom Based Tutorial--This model does not require the close interaction and/or exchange which takes place in the team teaching or parallel teaching models. In this model the regular classroom teacher merely shares space with the special tutor and his/her student. It does provide a classroom environment and at least some interaction with other students that is not available in the home-based or tutorial model. An adaptation of this model involves substituting the resource room for the regular classroom.

(4) Separate Tutorial with Regular Classroom Support--In this model the special education tutor and his/her student have a separate space outside the regular classroom as their "base." They work here together for some portion of the day and as available and appropriate, spend time in other situations and classrooms. In this model, student volunteers from other classrooms may also be recruited to come in to interact with the special needs student.

(5) Regular Classroom Placement with Support Services--In this model, the student with severe and/or multiple special needs is placed in a regular classroom with a trained teacher assistant. The assistant works with both the regular teacher and an itinerant education specialist for severe and multiple special needs. Support services such as occupational therapy, physical and/or communication therapy take place in the regular classroom.

In this model, the IEP is developed by the team and supervised by the itinerant education specialist. The regular classroom teacher is part of the IEP Team.

As is obvious, the amount of cooperation of regular education staff, the role of therapists and support staff, interaction with non-handicapped peers, and utilization of school resources differs in each model. No one model will work in all situations. However, at least one model should be adaptable for most rural and remote LEAs. Some models may work for particular age groups in a district, but not for other age groups. For example, the team teaching model lends itself to self-contained elementary level classrooms, especially those with a more open philosophy where movement, activity and individualization are common practice. The separate tutorial with regular classroom support might be particularly suited to the adolescent with greater need to be involved with more community-based training for the development of vocational and/or independent living skills.

The purpose of this paper is not to attempt to simplify the complex problem facing rural communities who wish to provide services to all their students, but, rather to offer some possible solutions for their consideration. The decision made on the local level must be reflective of the philosophy of the community, the long-range planning of the district, and the needs of the parents, students, and teachers who will be affected by the decision.

Each of the options described has its own limitations and none is perfect. The success or failure of one or another depends upon those adults in a particular situation and their willingness to support a particular model. I have seen each of the models described above work successfully in rural areas across the state of Maine. The type of program used has nothing to do with the

severity of the handicapping condition of the student involved. Some of the most severely handicapped are those students who are placed full-time in the regular classroom in the team-teaching and the regular classroom with support services models. These are also the unusual cases since they require the most cooperation and coordination from the regular classroom teacher and the most courage on the part of the parents and administrators involved in finding solutions to new problems. Certainly any level regular classroom placement will not be appropriate for all students with severe and multiple special needs. For some, however, it may offer new opportunities to live, grow and develop with their community peers.